

## **Frequently Asked Questions About the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery's Peer Support Program**

### **LIST OF QUESTIONS:**

[What is peer counseling?](#)

[What do certified peer counselors do?](#)

[Can peers provide peer counseling with DBHR certification?](#)

[What are the requirements to qualify as a certified peer counselor?](#)

[What do the employers of certified peer counselors need to understand about the qualification process?](#)

[What are the application requirements for the Peer Support program?](#)

[How do I apply to become a certified peer counselor?](#)

[What do I need to do to be prepared for training once I am scheduled to attend?](#)

[What are my options for Peer Support training?](#)

[Who administers the certified peer counseling examination?](#)

[Who is ultimately responsible for providing and overseeing Peer Support services?](#)

[Is Peer Support a provider-based or a consumer-based program?](#)

[How is Peer Support funded and how is the funding distributed?](#)

[Are certified peer counselors paid employees or volunteers?](#)

[Is Peer Support just for Medicaid-eligible consumers?](#)

[How does Peer Support affect clubhouses?](#)

[Are parents eligible to be certified peer counselors?](#)

[Why is there no parent-specific track to the certified peer counselor training?](#)

[How is Peer Support related to the following programs: NAMI Peer to Peer, Peer Support for Older Adults, A Common Voice, WA Dads, etc?](#)

[Who should I contact for more information?](#)

### **WHAT IS PEER COUNSELING?**

The Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery offers Peer Support among the Medicaid approved services for mental health consumers who are served by community mental health agencies or their subcontractors. The Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery (DBHR), formerly the Mental Health Division, implemented this peer counselor training program in 2005. In order to be paid under Medicaid, services must be provided by a certified peer counselor who has been qualified by the DBHR.

### **WHAT DO CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELORS DO?**

The State Plan states that certified peer counselors must be able to:

- Identify services and activities that promote recovery by instilling hope and experiences which lead to meaning and purpose, and which decrease stigma in the environments in which they serve;
- Articulate points in their own recovery stories that are relevant to the obstacles faced by the consumers of mental health services;

## **Frequently Asked Questions About the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery's Peer Support Program**

- Promote personal responsibility for recovery as the individual consumer or mental health services defines recovery;
- Implement recovery practices in the broad arena of mental health services delivery system;
- Provide a wide range of tasks to assist consumers in regaining control over their own lives and recovery process (e.g., promoting socialization, self advocacy, developing natural supports, stable living arrangements, education, supported employment);
- Serve as a consumer advocate;
- Provide consumer information and peer support in a range of settings;
- And, model competency in recovery and ongoing coping skills.

In addition, certified peer counselors assist consumers to identify and reach their own goals, help consumers become effective self advocates, and work with consumers one-to-one and in group settings. As an employee of a community mental health agency, certified peer counselors are responsible for documentation of a consumer's progress towards their recovery goals.

### **CAN PEERS PROVIDE PEER COUNSELING WITHOUT DBHR CERTIFICATION?**

Yes, provided the services are not paid for out of Medicaid dollars.

### **WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS TO QUALIFY AS A CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELOR?**

Per Washington Administrative Code (WAC) and the Medicaid State Plan Amendment, approved applicants must complete the DBHR or Regional Support Network (RSN) minimum 40 hour training which utilizes the DBHR approved curriculum. Following completion of the training, the applicant must pass the written and oral exam (an applicant may take the exam up to three (3) times from the date of completion of training). When these two requirements have been met, the applicant will receive a letter from the DBHR stating that they have met the requirements qualifying them as a certified peer counselor. It should be noted that certified peer counselors who work for community mental health agencies (CMHAs) may be required to also seek a counselor credential from the Department of Health as this is a requirement for Medicaid-funded services. Certified peer counselors should discuss this question with their employer as their employer should be knowledgeable about the source of funding for their position. Minimum training requirements are directed by Washington's Medicaid State Plan.

It is important to understand that qualification as a certified peer counselor does **not** guarantee employment.

## **Frequently Asked Questions About the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery's Peer Support Program**

### **WHAT DO EMPLOYERS OF CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELORS NEED TO UNDERSTAND ABOUT THE QUALIFICATION PROCESS?**

Qualifying as a certified peer counselor does not mean that DBHR has made an independent judgment about the appropriateness of a person to be a peer counselor. The qualification process ensures that those who self identify as mental health consumers complete the approved training and pass the certified peer counselor examination.

Employers of certified peer counselors must utilize their own methods to hire suitable staff. Employers should understand that best practice for Peer Support occurs when the peer counselors have similar life experiences as those that they serve. Certified peer counselors with the experience of navigating the mental health system as parents of children receiving services may be well-equipped to work with other parents. Similarly, certified peer counselors with the life experience as an adult mental health consumer may be successfully paired with other adult mental health consumers.

### **WHAT ARE THE APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PEER SUPPORT PROGRAM?**

Certified peer counselors must meet these criteria:

1. Identify as a consumer of mental health services as defined by WAC 388-865-0150,
  - "Consumer" means:
    - A person who has applied for, is eligible for, or who has received mental health services.
    - For a child, under the age of thirteen, or for a child age thirteen or older whose parents or legal guardians are involved in the treatment plan, the definition of consumer includes parents or legal guardians.
2. Be 18 or older.
3. Demonstrate that they are well grounded in their own mental health recovery for at least one year when they apply.
4. Demonstrate qualities of leadership, including governance, advocacy, creation, implementation or facilitation of peer to peer groups or activities.

## **Frequently Asked Questions About the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery's Peer Support Program**

### **HOW DO I APPLY TO BECOME A CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELOR?**

Obtain a training application, available online at the DBHR Peer Support website: <http://www.dshs.wa.gov/dbhr/mhpeer.shtml> or from the DBHR. Submit application to the DBHR, seeking approval to attend the training. Once the application is received, it is reviewed for completeness and that it demonstrates fulfillment of all of the requirements. You may be contacted by phone or letter by the DBHR if there are questions regarding your application. If approved, you will be notified that you are on a waiting list for training. Approved applicants receive a letter inviting them to training a few weeks prior to the date the training occurs. Training dates are posted on the DBHR Peer Support website.

Please note that the DBHR receives overwhelming requests to attend training and all approved applicants may not be able to be accommodated.

### **WHAT DO I NEED TO DO TO BE PREPARED FOR TRAINING ONCE I AM SCHEDULED TO ATTEND?**

All class participants will be sent a copy of Mary Ellen Copeland's Wellness Recovery Action Plan booklet. It is recommended that participants read the book and begin preparing their own "WRAP" prior to attending class. While it is important for those attending the class to complete this exercise, WRAP plans will not be submitted or shared with the group.

### **WHAT ARE MY OPTIONS FOR PEER SUPPORT TRAINING?**

You may take the DBHR sponsored training or a RSN-sponsored training. RSNs are allowed to conduct training under the guidelines per the DBHR- RSN contracts provided that the trainings are funded with state-only or Federal Block Grant money. Please contact your local RSN to determine if they have a local training option for you. If you choose to take training from your RSN, your application to attend training must still be approved by the DBHR.

Currently, the DBHR offers trainings multiple times during the year. At this time, the DBHR covers the cost of a shared hotel room and meals eaten buffet style with the group (no room service). There is no charge for registration and your training materials are also provided at no cost. (These costs are covered based on the availability of continued Federal Block Grant funding which is determined on a year to year basis.) You are responsible for arranging and providing for your own transportation including all costs associated.

## **Frequently Asked Questions About the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery's Peer Support Program**

### **WHO ADMINISTERS THE CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELING EXAMINATION?**

In order to maintain consistency of the testing practices and to protect the content of the exam for all test takers, the exam is only administered by the DBHR's contractor, currently the Washington Institute for Mental Health Research and Training (WIMHRT). DBHR may also administer the test themselves. Additionally, the exam is proprietary to the DBHR.

### **WHO IS ULTIMATELY RESPONSIBLE FOR PROVIDING/OVERSEEING PEER SUPPORT SERVICES?**

Peer Support services may be provided by a licensed community mental health agency (CMHA) or under contract with a licensed CMHA. The licensed provider is responsible for meeting the requirements of the Peer Support service.

### **IS PEER SUPPORT A PROVIDER-BASED OR A CONSUMER-BASED PROGRAM?**

The principles and values of Peer Support are consumer-based. The administration and oversight of the program is the responsibility of the licensed provider contracting with the RSN.

### **HOW IS PEER SUPPORT FUNDED AND HOW IS THE FUNDING DISTRIBUTED?**

Peer Support is currently included in the capitation rate (Medicaid) payment to the RSNs. For the services to continue to be included in future payment rates, the services must meet the definition of the Medicaid State Plan modality of Peer Support. If other peer counselor or support services are delivered that do not meet the Medicaid state plan modality definition, those services must be funded by other mechanisms (e.g., grants, United Way, etc).

### **ARE CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELORS PAID EMPLOYEES OR VOLUNTEERS?**

Certified peer counselors may work as full or part time employees or they may choose to volunteer.

## **Frequently Asked Questions About the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery's Peer Support Program**

### **IS PEER SUPPORT JUST FOR MEDICAID-ELIGIBLE CONSUMERS?**

Peer Support services that meet the Medicaid State Plan modality definition and are provided to Medicaid enrollees are included in the Medicaid capitated payment to the RSNs. Peer Support services may be provided to non-Medicaid consumers; however these services may not be paid for by the Medicaid capitated payment. An RSN may choose to use non-Medicaid funding (i.e.: State-only dollars, Federal Block grant funding, etc) to provide Peer Support for non-Medicaid consumers.

### **HOW DOES PEER SUPPORT AFFECT CLUBHOUSES?**

Peer Support and Consumer Clubhouses are two separate services. An RSN may choose to incorporate the two services in one setting; however program decisions are made locally.

### **ARE PARENTS ELIGIBLE TO BE CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELORS?**

Yes. The WAC 388-865-0150 includes some parents and legal guardians in its definition of consumer (see definition listed above). It is important that certified peer counselors have common experiences with the people they work with. Certified peer counselors whose experience as a consumer is as a parent or guardian should work with other parents or family members because they share similar experiences. Adult consumer certified peer counselors should work with other adult consumers because they share similar experiences. Some certified peer counselors have had both of the experiences described above and could work with either population.

### **WHY IS THERE NO PARENT SPECIFIC TRACK TO THE CERTIFIED PEER COUNSELING TRAINING?**

The training topics are generalized to meet the requirements under the state plan and can be utilized with both parents/guardians and adult consumers. We have added a training module devoted to the specific needs related to working with parents and guardians to the revised training curriculum.

### **HOW IS PEER SUPPORT RELATED TO THE FOLLOWING PROGRAMS: NAMI PEER TO PEER, PEER SUPPORT FOR OLDER ADULTS, A COMMON VOICE, WA DADS, ETC.?**

All of these programs are examples of Peer Support models individual to different organizations. The DBHR's model of Peer Support is the only one that qualifies as an

## **Frequently Asked Questions About the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery's Peer Support Program**

approved Medicaid State Plan modality paid through the capitated rate to the RSNs. The DBHR has no authority or oversight of other peer support services.

### **WHO SHOULD I CONTACT FOR MORE INFORMATION?**

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